

FOREWORD

In 1938 Buell Quain spent four months, from August to November, 114 among the Trumai Indians of the upper Xingú River area of central Brazil. In December of 1938 he was recalled to Rio de Janeiro, and failing to obtain governmental permission for his return to the upper Xingú, at least under conditions allowing minimal possibilities for field research, he was unable to continue his studies among the Trumai. He went instead to do ethnographic and linguistic work among the Gê-speaking Kraho in the state of Maranhão. There, in April 1939, he died.

Quain's research among the Trumai was, therefore, interrupted and incomplete. He left it in the form of hand-written field notes and a diary. These were carefully and painstakingly arranged and typed by his mother, Dr. Fannie Dunn Quain. Several years after her son's death, Dr. Quain entrusted these notes to me with the understanding that if they proved to be of anthropological value, they would be prepared for publication or otherwise made available to scholars interested in the field. At one time I had hoped that another anthropologist might continue Quain's researches among the Trumai, and that his notes might thus be incorporated into a more complete investigation of this little-known society. But, in 1946, I was informed by Eduardo Galvão, who had visited the upper Xingú River area, that the number of Trumai had critically diminished and that Trumai life was so seriously disorganized that it was doubtful whether they could exist as a tribal entity. It was apparent that little, if any, ethnographic data on the Trumai beyond that contained in the scattered references of earlier anthropologists who had visited the region and the data in Buell Quain's notes would ever be available to us.

Robert F. Murphy therefore undertook to analyze, order, and prepare 128 for publication the data gathered by Buell Quain. His task was first 114 conceived as essentially that of an editor and a grant from the Buell Quain Fund was made to him for this purpose. It soon became clear that 124 ordering and editing were not enough. While the notes were rich in detail and insights, there were many gaps which Quain certainly was aware of, and there were interpretations and generalizations about Trumai culture which he undoubtedly would have inserted in his final report. Robert Murphy found that to understand Buell Quain's field work, he would have to immerse himself in the only available document-

FOREWORD

vii

perienced. He told me of the effect of the tropical dawn on tropical forest peoples. Traveling in the dark, he noted, Indian canoe men tend to break the monotony by singing and talking, but just before the sun appears, they suddenly fall silent, as if in expectation of a sacred moment. Again and again, in camps and while traveling with Brazilian Indians, I was reminded of Quain's perception. 114

Although Robert Murphy rightly points out the decline of population and the trend toward disintegration of Trumai culture even in 1938, the Trumai were a functioning primitive society when Quain visited them. The upper Xingú River area was still very difficult to reach at that time. In 1938 access was by way of Cuyabá, the capital of Matto Grosso. Quain traveled from Cuyabá to the Indian post Simões Lopes by truck, then over savanna grasslands for six days on oxen, then down the Kuliseu River by canoe for seven days to a mission station maintained by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Young. After a delay here of almost three weeks, he spent another three weeks reaching the Trumai, traveling slowly and visiting several tribal groups *en route*. The Kamayurá, at whose village he stayed shortly, provided him with canoe men for the last lap of his journey. It took Quain 38 days to return up river and cross the savanna country to Simões Lopes on leaving the Trumai in late 1938. 114
122
161
182

Quain's letters to his mother and to his colleagues describe his trip to the Trumai vividly. To quote a passage telling of his experiences on the upper Kuliseu River on his way to the mission station: 123

The river journey was pleasant, until we began to have trouble. Even then I enjoyed it thoroughly. I had too much baggage for two canoes as I had planned. We had to use three. Besides myself I have two Brazilian men and a boy to help with the canoes. I had to paddle one myself and I enjoyed it thoroughly — despite the fact that white men aren't supposed to do that kind of thing. I gave the largest canoe with the most valuable cargo to the Brazilian whom I thought was the best canoeist. He had the boy to help with the paddling and poling through the rapids. Nevertheless it was his canoe which filled with water on the second day. We had to stop on a rock ledge and spread the things out to dry. Lots of rice and jeans, papers and books, etc. It was evening. Not until the next morning did we realize that the sun barely touched the rocky ledge that we had chosen for drying the cargo. There was a wind — the worst of the dampness was removed before nightfall. Everything went well until we struck some swift rapids on the fifth day, when the same large canoe wrapped itself around a rock and the cargo went sailing down the river about eight miles an hour. I managed to rescue everything but a bag of farinha, a frying pan, a fishline and a couple of cakes of the hard unrefined sugar, which forms an important part of the diet throughout Matto Grosso.*

And about the Indians he wrote from the missionary station:

My work for the next month is going to be a jumble of languages. It may take a month to reach the Trumai because the Indians like to rest all the time. This means that I will have ample time to contact several in each of three different linguistic families (Carib, Arawak, Tupi). The Trumai are entirely unrelated. This

* Quain letter, July 13, 1938.

INTRODUCTION

Many people do not read the prefaces to monographs. This one must be read in order to understand what follows. 114

The writer never met his co-author, Buell Quain, for Quain died sixteen years ago. Some six months before his death he had terminated a period of four months field research among the Trumai Indians of the Xingú River in northern Matto Grosso, Brazil. Among his effects were his field notes, which represented the results of one of the most difficult investigations ever undertaken by an ethnologist.

In 1949, shortly after I commenced my graduate studies in anthropology, Professor Charles Wagley of Columbia University asked me to edit the Trumai notes. After further consideration of the material, Professor Wagley and I concluded that the notes had been ordered as far as was possible by Quain's mother, Dr. Fannie Dunn Quain, and that they could best be presented in the form of a monograph, which I was to write.

First, let me describe Buell Quain's Trumai notes. In essence they consist of a remarkably detailed field diary in which Quain had recorded the daily activities and events of the Trumai village. If a woman walked from one house to another bearing food, it was duly stated. The play of the children, the facial expressions apparent during ceremonies, the slightest nuances of interpersonal behavior were all put into the notebook. Present also are charts showing the daily economic activities of every villager and a report, in all its minutiae, of what occurred in a household of an afternoon. Quain also set down in his daily log many comments made to him by his Trumai informants and scraps of conversation which he overheard. 126

The notes are a triumph of participant observation. Quain understood very little Trumai, although his diary shows that he was learning it rapidly by the time of his departure. He evidently maintained some communication with certain bilingual Trumai by using Tupi, of which he appears to have had a fragmentary knowledge. Lacking the means to do detailed informant work, Quain leaned heavily on his observations of the behavior and activity of all the Trumai, and he also learned much from his own personal interaction with them. He was deeply sensitive to the mutual relationships between himself and the subjects of his study, as he was completely alone in his sojourn; he did not even have a Brazilian backwoodsman for help and companionship. He entrusted 123
[122]

/191/

000

Thirteenth Chapter

Meeting With the Trumai



During the night
Castro's canoe, the
only one whose load
was not brought to
shore, floated away;
in two hours it travels
one legoa; Valentin

and Satyr set out in pursuit.

● 122 31 Aug. φ $11^{\circ} 46'.5$, λ $31'.6$, km. 18.12, total 466.81.

132

4:10 A.M.: I 744.0, dry. 19.2.

6:45 A.M.: I 744.6, II 737.0, dry. 19.4, wet.
19.0, surc. 9° , water 25.8.

5:40 P.M.: I 744.4, II 735.6, dry. 24.8, wet. 21.9,
horizon hazy 4, wind = 0, water 27.9.

9:45 P.M.: I 745.0, dry. 20.8.

484
501
609

"Vem os compadres! oh, quantas canoas!" suddenly rang
out around 10:00; "the compadres are coming; oh, how many
canoes!" The soldiers hastened from the nearby camp in the
forest; everyone armed himself and watched the canoes drawing
up picturesquely in a long row -- and a magnificent sight it was
as one after another came around the bend and slowly drifted
down the Kulisëu. Two Indians stood erect, with quiet compo-
sure, their bows in readiness; a third sat in the center and
scarcely moved the oar. We counted 14 canoes and 43 persons.

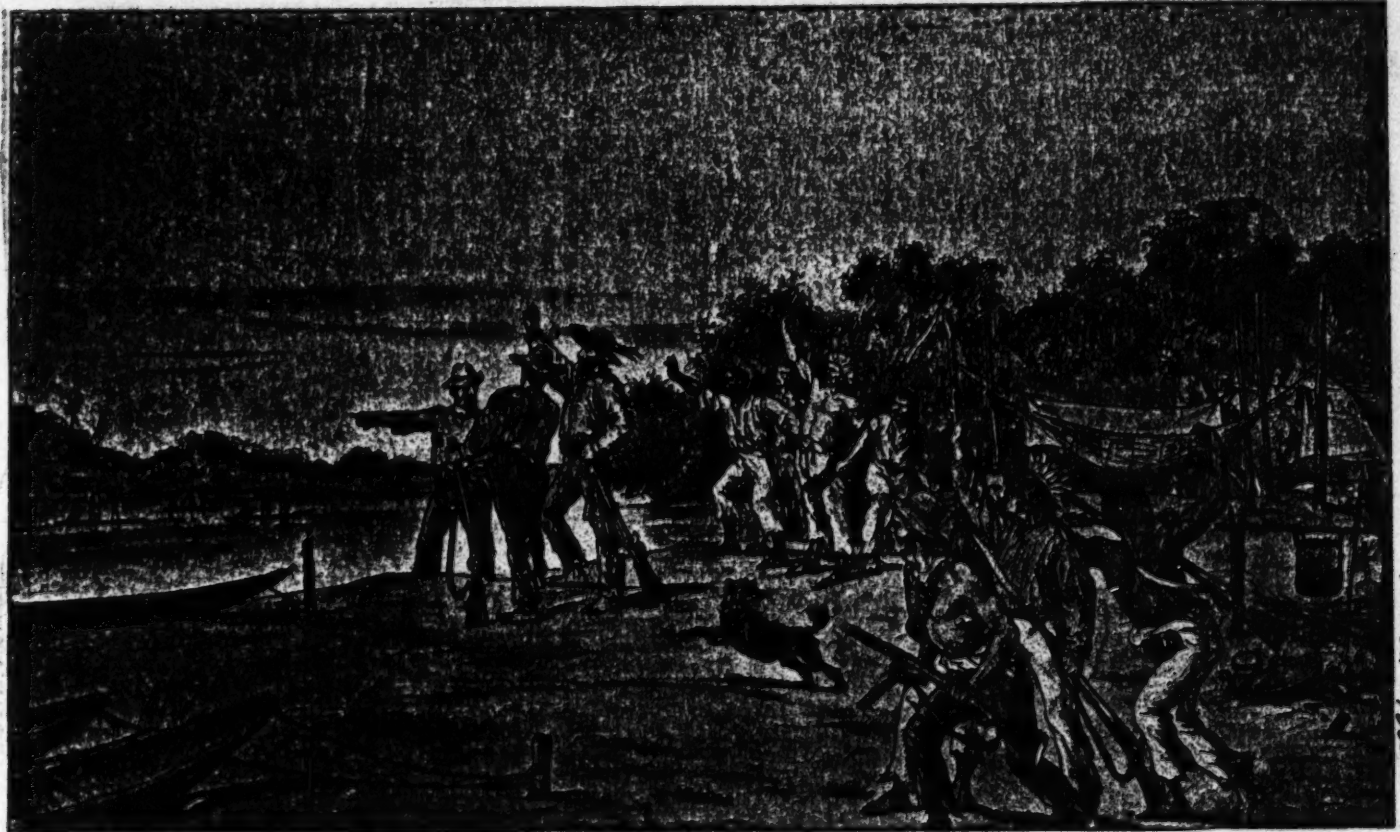
122
133
501
123
609

1: Steinen--75 D,E-5

(1884) 1886

SP7 Bacali

Trumai, SP28



Meeting with the Trumai.

T /124 cont. /

123 pocket along the way. A certain amount was obviously missing; I hope it was distributed among various fanciers and taken by them with some success for the skin diseases particularly common among the Yaulapiti.

T
126

Much as we were urged to depart, we still had to undertake at least the most important body measurements and would not relent; seven men were measured in haste, in between our packing, and the only photographic plate left was used for a group shot -- unfortunately ruined later.

T
122

At 9:45 we set out in two canoes, accompanied by four Trumai. Three times one would have to sleep, they said, before reaching their villages. The Mehinakú could also be reached by way of the canals and only one day was needed to their second village. At 11:00 we landed near the Auetó village, at a place other than where we had left. In the damp leaves lay huge quantities of giant earthworms; wherever one put his foot, he stepped on them. The path led us to the two huts of the Yaulapiti-Auetó families.

T
[132]

T
361

It is advisable to insert here what Vogel and Perrot reported about the Trumai villages after their return home from Schingú-Koblentz. They had not caught sight of an Indian, but below the place where the Kulisehu empties into the Kuluëne, on a bank five meters high, they had found one Trumai village of eight houses and, a kilometer farther east, a second one of five houses with buildings under construction among them. The Suyá had burned down all the houses and smashed whatever

T
727

T
241

T
764

was left of large pots and utensils. There were plantings of remarkably large size and careful cultivation directly adjoining the villages. About ten fresh graves were noted; judging from the circular excavation, the corpses had been buried in a squatting position. They seemed to lie deep; at least they were /125/

B
186

not uncovered by some superficial subsequent digging. Antonio had been very alarmed when Perrot said to him: "o doutor Carlos precisa d'uma cabeça /Doctor Carlos wants a head/." It was only with great effort that Antonio had been persuaded to go along on the trip and expose himself to the possibility of meeting the detested Trumai.